357

Houses are generally situated in the middle of an enclosure which serves as a garden, and where coconut palms, betel palms and other fruit trees are planted.

276

Use of tobacco and betel. The Laotians use tobacco, which they grow and prepare quite skilfully, in the form of conical cigarettes which are rolled in dried banana leaves. They also mix it with their betel quids. Everybody smokes--men, women and children. It is not unusual to see children four years old, completely naked, puffing clouds of smoke from a cigarette which is enormous in comparison to their little fingers.

Like a great many other peoples of Asia, Laotians chew "betel." As we know this type of quid is composed of a leaf of "piper betel" which is smeared with slaked lime and on which is placed tobacco, a piece of betel nut or some "sisiet" bark (or [185] the extract from this bark, called catechu). It is then rolled and placed in the mouth between the cheek and the gums.

Chewing betel causes abundant salivation, blood red in color, which makes quite an impression at first sight but to which one gradually becomes accustomed.

It is claimed that chewing betel is not a mere habit, but that it has several useful effects on the organism. It is supposed to keep one from being thirsty and to be an astringent and tonic, somewhat like cola or coca.

302
751

Teeth lacquer. So as to preserve the enamel of their teeth from the corrosive action of the lime and from other acidulous elements contained in the betel nut, the Laotians have the custom of lacquering their teeth black. To accomplish this they rub them with the sap of certain hardwood trees, which they obtain through partial combustion of the wood and condensation of the smoke on an iron spatula. A kind of sticky black coating is thereby produced, which dries rapidly and is made to adhere to the teeth by means of alum.

276

Opium. The use of opium is quite widespread in Laos, and unfortunately its effects do not help to diminish the natural apathy of the race.

304

Tattoos. It is customary for men to be tattooed from beneath the knee to the upper part of the thigh. For this reason the Laotians of the left bank of the Mekong are called "white bellies" in opposition to the Youns of the other bank, whose tattoos cover the stomach and abdomen and who are known as "black bellies." The tattoos are